



**Book review: Carina Sjöholm - Litterära resor - turism i spåren efter böcker, filmer och
"författare**

Sandvik, Kjetil

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BOOK REVIEW

Litterära resor – turism i spåren efter böcker, filmer och författare

Sjöholm, Carina

Gothenburg, Sweden: Makadam Förlag, 2011.

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Carina Sjöholm has written a deeply inspiring and enlightening book that embraces an ever-expanding field of research that combines the study of places and tourism. In a thorough introduction to the cultural history of literary travel, she demonstrates how fiction-inspired travel has evolved into a widespread tourism trend, within which popular cultural genres (e.g. the thriller in particular) play an important role. She argues that literary tourism is probably too narrow a term to describe a phenomenon transgressing purely fiction-inspired travel; that is, where the hybridization of media (cross-mediality) makes it unclear what inspired the trip at the end: the book, the movie or TV series based on the book or the author's biography? Despite the multiplicity of inspiration sources, Sjöholm's book reveals that it is always fiction in one form or another that motivates the literary tourist. Tourists can follow in the footsteps of fictional characters, for instance visit places featured in fictional narratives and novels, films or TV series (such as Ystad in Henning Mankell's stories about Wallander or Fjällbacka as setting for Camilla Läckberg's thrillers). Furthermore, they can also follow in the footsteps of the author (e.g. embarking on the Astrid Lindgren trail to Vimmerby) or they can seek out shooting locations of films and television series (*Alle vi Børn* in Bulderby or *Emil of Lönneberga*, etc.).

Based on three major case studies, respectively, Ystad as Wallander Land, Fjällbacka made popular by Läckberg and Vimmerby as the stage for Astrid Lindgren's literary universe, Sjöholm demonstrates with a great theoretical insight how places in the experience society are overwritten by fiction, staging relationships between actual places, fictional stories and their authors. With personal engagement, she describes in detail how this phenomenon involves a wide range of actors: such as the dedicated tourist, who wants to delve deeper into a fictional universe, or local residents, positioning their identities amid cultural and tourism trends and, last but not least, marketers who attempt to harness the popularity of Mankell, Läckberg and Lindgren in particular, in order to create place branding stories with slogans such as "Fjällbacka's thriller queen or the thriller queen's Fjällbacka" (p. 118).

In the introductory chapter, Sjöholm points out that interest in literary travel has intensified in recent years and this is especially conspicuous in relation to the thriller

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genre (both as a novel and in remediated forms, such as films and TV series). Crime novels are characterized by a distinct realism, which plays an important role in the way how places are represented in this literary genre. The crime scene as a distinctive cultural concept is rooted in both historical and criminological heritages, and it implies a strong sense of place and a high degree of realism. Unlike other narrative forms, such as adventure and fantasy (e.g. Astrid Lindgren's tales of the *Brothers Lionheart*, *Mio my Mio*, *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*), unfolding crime novels are not set in fantastic worlds; even though they take place in the past or future, they are immersed in realism. For instance, the dystopic and noir urban vision of Ridley Scott's futuristic *Blade Runner* is clearly inspired by the way Los Angeles is depicted in Raymond Chandler's Marlowe detective series. Likewise, the most popular contemporary Scandinavian thriller series are set in actual (existing) locations. The characteristics of these places, which are described in great detail, play a significant role in the way stories are told and often reveal autobiographical links between the selected locations and the authors. On page 14, Sjöholm cites author Åsa Eriksson from a book fair, who emphasizes the importance of actually having visited the bridge she describes in her latest book. As such, the authors themselves become a guarantor of authenticity; if, for example, Norwegian Anne Holt sets her stories about the female police inspector Hanne Willumsen, she selects a specific district in Oslo (Grenland), rather than a fictional metropolis. As a former employee at the local criminal police, Holt has a personal experience of working in this part of the city and can relate to its unique demographic and historical conditions. Sjöholm argues that this is not something new; mysteries and crime novels have (often) been set on real locations: from Conan Doyle's London, Simenon's Paris, Hammet's San Francisco, Chandler's or Connelly's Los Angeles, Burke's New Orleans, Rankin's Edinburgh to Staal's Bergen, Larsson's or Marklund's Stockholm, Läckberg's Fjällbacka and Mankell's Ystad. By using these sites as locations for their crime stories (letting film and television productions using the same spots as "scene of the crime"), these authors contribute to stage these places for potential tourist destination purposes, for example, as the basis of various "crime tours" and "murder walks".

Sjöholm describes with great precision and detail (particularly in the chapters on Läckberg's Fjällbacka and Mankell's Ystad), the way how these guided city tours – for example, "In Wallander's Footsteps" – offer a new experiential dimension of Ystad beyond the historical figures and real events. Tourists embarking on these tours are simultaneously walking in a fictional Ystad, featuring as the "scene of the crime" in the novel and television series on chief inspector Kurt Wallander. As such, in the eye of the literary tourist, the city of Ystad becomes partially fictionalized, where streets and houses act as scenography and its inhabitants as extras starring in the Wallander story. Sjöholm refers to media researcher Anne-Marit Waade's description of this place augmentation strategy, where the murders and evil of Mankell's universe contribute to the demonization of Ystad. The story that lies so close to the real city, creates a special kind of augmented reality for both residents and tourists. The crime scenes featured in the novels lay a second imaginary veil over the city's actual locations. Pictures from the novels and TV series are mixed with what one looks upon as a tourist. Fiction and reality are interwoven, and this hybrid version of Ystad is exploited in the branding strategies of the local and regional municipalities

to attract new residents and investmentors. For example, the *Film about Ystad* (2008) presented on the municipality's website, features not only Ystad's scenic coastline and picturesque old town, but also mentions the city's role as a movie backdrop and the crime scene in the Wallander universe: corpses, blood stains and the murder weapons are mixed with summer idyll, hollyhocks and quiet province. Another example of how this branding strategy appeals to the international literary tourist can be found in the Swedish online news magazine, *The Local*: "Discover Ystad: Just follow the trail of blood (. . .) Welcome to Ystad: home of sand, sea – and slaughter. This southern Sweden seaside town, previously best known for its fine beaches and quaint timber-framed houses, has become synonymous with murder. You could be forgiven for thinking that the only place in Europe statistically less safe to live was Detective Superintendent Barnaby's Midsummer".

The book thoroughly demonstrates that contemporary literary tourism and literary destinations are different from fiction-inspired travel in the past (e.g. in the footsteps of Daphne du Maurier or Agatha Christie), as they are – beyond the mediatizing circuit – also associated with extensive place marketing interests. Sjöholm labels these mechanisms in the book's last chapter as the *dramaturgy of places*, which describes how places become tourist attractions along a fiction-propelled branding strategy. Places become staged, revitalized and endowed with narratives to appeal for the tourist's desire to experience the authentic story: she lived here, it happened here. . . . As Sjöholm states on page 178, many tourists travel to experience how a real person, such as an author might have lived, while others travel in the fictional characters' footsteps. Fictional events can thus mark and boost the attractivity of a location, and, paradoxically, tourists perceive the fictional as the most authentic: the real requires a shape to appear as real. Curiosity as such can serve as a cultural power, is one of Sjöholm important points here.

As a concluding remark, a small critical commentary may be put forward. Sjöholm maintains that medias play a prominent role in literary tourism (not only in terms of tourist destinations becoming mediated via thrillers in the form of novels, TV series or films, or through cameras, mobile phones, travel blogs, profiles on social networking sites), but also in the mediatization of society as such. It seems peculiar that Sjöholm does not pursue this statement further, despite a brief referral to Maria Månsson's case studies of mediatization practices in the travel blogs of Da Vinci Code-tourists at Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, revealing how these tourists blend historical facts, bible history and Dan Brown's mystery into a coherent narrative. The role of media in our "sense of place" could be developed further to provide the book's many good observations with an extra analytical lens. Our gaze – what John Urry calls "the tourist gaze" – is influenced by media on several levels, and the way we make sense of places relates partly to how they are presented via travel media (travel magazines, documentaries), partly how the tourist experience is mediated and mediatized (by using of mobile media guides or augmented reality applications. Finally, our perceptions of places are also affected by the use of new media platforms in the storytelling and self-presentation of the individual tourist (by using social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare or travel blogs).

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140 This criticism does not challenge the fact that Sjöholm's book is scientifically rigorous and personally dedicated introduction to literary tourism, and both its theoretical chapters and case studies can be highly recommended.

145 KJETIL SANDVIK
Associate Professor,
Media Studies and Thriller Research,
University of Copenhagen, Denmark
E-mail: sandvik@hum.ku.dk
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